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SUBJECT: FORMER FM TARASYUK ON RUSSIA, POLITICS

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Former Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, like other Western oriented Ukrainians, is looking for further reassurance that the "re-set" of relations with Russia will not come at Ukraine's expense. Tarasyuk regards Medvedev's security proposal as an effort to divide Europe from the US. He sees PM Tymoshenko as the "least bad" option for President. Challenger Yatsenyuk is not up to job. Regions Party leader Yanukovych would appease Russia at the expense of Ukrainian interests. End Summary.

Reaction to Obama Visit to Moscow

¶2. (C) Polcouns met July 14 with Former FM Borys Tarasyuk, who also serves as leader of the center-right Rukh party and Chairman of the Rada European Integration Committee. Tarasyuk expressed concern that Ukraine might diminish in importance to the US as a result of the "re-set" of relations with Moscow. Nonetheless, he agreed President Obama's remarks in Moscow regarding Ukraine were reassuring. What worries Tarasyuk is the prospect that private meetings between President Obama and Putin and Medvedev might have been more conciliatory toward Russia. We noted that the Administration's public message is the same as its private message. Tarasyuk said Ukraine would seek reaffirmation of its continued importance to the US during the visit of the Vice President July 20-22.

Medvedev Security Proposal: Divide Europe from the US

¶3. (C) Tarasyuk lamented that the constant bickering between President Yushchenko and PM Tymoshenko had damaged Ukraine's image and its attractiveness as a partner for the West. Tarasyuk contended Russia had successfully co-opted Germany and France to block the GOU's NATO aspirations. Medvedev's call for a new security architecture was designed to divide Western Europe from the US. It is reminiscent of the Soviet policy of the early Reagan years regarding missile deployments in Europe. Medvedev and Putin seek to "destroy the existing system" of Euro-Atlantic security. Georgia revealed a "new quality" of Russian aggressiveness. Russia repeated this aggressiveness last winter by cutting off the gas. Tarasyuk said that the Western response, especially that of EU members, to Georgia and the gas crisis had been inadequate. This emboldens the Kremlin to keep it up.

Post-START

¶4. (C) It is unfortunate, Tarasyuk underlined, that Ukraine is not participating in post-START talks. Ukraine would have been an ally for the US in the process. As it stands,

Ukraine will be left without security assurances. The Russian leadership (he cited Putin) has already threatened Ukraine with targeting by Russian nuclear weapons if Ukraine were to join NATO. This was in violation of the assurances contained in the "Budapest memorandum" -- under which Ukraine gave up its nuclear arsenal -- but had engendered little or no response from the West.

Fifth Column

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¶ 15. (C) In confronting Russia, Ukraine is hobbled by its domestic divisions, Tarasyuk said. Indeed, Ukraine has a large "fifth column" that is working to serve Russian interests and undermine the Ukrainian state. The pro-Russian line of the Party of Regions and Lytvyn Bloc -- not to mention the Communists -- risks turning Ukraine into a Russian satellite. Yanukovych, Lytvyn and others seem to be competing publicly to see who can be the most subservient to Russia. Tymoshenko, by contrast, is ready to deal with the Russians, but would not sell out to them. Yushchenko has proven to be out of touch regarding Russia (and in general) and is "unable to realistically assess the situation."

Crimea

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¶ 16. (C) Russia will not do in Crimea what it did in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Tarasyuk believes. For one thing the Ukrainian central government is operating in Crimea. The Kremlin will prefer to use surrogates, such as pro-Russian,

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pro-Kremlin NGOs, to stir up trouble. Ukrainian military forces deployed in Crimea would be enough to deter Russian aggression. "Our military is in bad shape," he said -- "but so is theirs." Tarasyuk believes it is essential for the Russian Black Sea Fleet to depart Sevastopol on schedule in 2017.

Presidential Politics: Tymoshenko Best of the Lot

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¶ 17. (C) Turning to politics, Tarasyuk said Yanukovych is "doing nothing" -- and benefiting in the polls from it. The Party of Regions merely criticizes the government and presents cynical populist measures to the Rada, such as the demand to increase the minimum wage at a time of severe budgetary crisis. Tarasyuk said he had warned Tymoshenko last year that her popularity would suffer if she did not give up the premiership, but she insisted on staying. She is populist too and not above lying (as most recently in comments to the media in which she denied that she had discussed scrapping direct Presidential elections as part of the failed coalitions negotiation with Regions). Nonetheless Tarasyuk said he would likely endorse Tymoshenko for President; she is the "least bad" option available.

Achievements of Rukh

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¶ 18. (C) Despite the damage done to the legacy of the Orange Revolution by the Tymoshenko-Yushchenko rift, 2004 had ushered in real and enduring change in key areas. Freedom of speech and assembly and the right to free elections are now secure. Tarasyuk underlined that his Rukh party had been at the center of the transformation, indeed "no other Ukrainian political force has done more." We mentioned the Rukh posters all around Kyiv, featuring his face and celebrating the party's twentieth anniversary. Tarasyuk said that some in the party want him to run for President but he did not expect to.

Yatsenyuk

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¶9. (C) Tarasyuk said that Presidential challenger Arceniy Yatsenyuk (a fellow member of the Our Ukraine Faction) was not ready to serve as President. Tarasyuk dismissed Yatsenyuk's resume as overblown. He had served only short stints as Foreign Minister and as Rada Speaker -- but had achieved little. "We can't turn the country over to him," Tarasyuk concluded.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Tarasyuk, twice Foreign Minister, is a perennial on the short list to return to the post (currently vacant) once again. US statements about no spheres of interest clearly helped to assuage some of Tarasyuk's concerns. Nonetheless, like others who strongly favor a Western orientation for Ukraine, Tarasyuk will require continued reassurance - and public signals from senior US officials that Ukraine's partnership with the US has not suffered.

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